Ginger, Zingiber officinale

- The spicy edible portion of the ginger plant is the rhizome, which botanically speaking, is a horizontal, modified, underground stem rather than a root.

- Ginger is in the Zingiberaceae family, the same family as cardamon (Elettaria cardamomum) and turmeric (Curcuma longa). It is not related to the wild gingers (Asarum spp.) found in the northern hemisphere, which have roots with a similar fragrance but contain aristolochic acid (which is associated with kidney damage).

- The tropical plant grows 3-4 feet, has bamboo-like pseudostems (false stems made of tightly wrapped leaf bases), narrow leaves and flowers that emerge behind bracts on a dense cone. Ornamental varieties have showy flowers.

- It takes 8 to 10 months to produce ginger commercially, and is grown in Asia, tropical Africa, parts of Central America and the Caribbean and Australia. Hardy to USDA Zones 8 – 12 and can be grown in containers if moved indoors in colder climates, when temperatures drop below 50°F.

- Ginger prefers to grow in hot humid climates in nutrient-rich soil.

- Young ginger rhizomes have a mild flavor. As they mature, the rhizomes become hotter to taste, drier and more fibrous.

- Ginger is used worldwide in sweet and savory foods and beverages, medicinally as well as in preparing cosmetics.

- The refreshing aroma of oleoresin, which is a mixture of essential oil and resin, is extracted from the rhizome for use in perfumes and cosmetics.

- Ginger was one of the first oriental spices to arrive in Europe, having been obtained by the Greeks and Romans from Arabian traders.

- Popular in diverse cultures, ginger was a major trade item gaining a following around the world including ancient India, Greece, Rome, China and in Victorian England.

- The long history of ginger’s health benefits dates to ancient Asian, Indian, Arabic and Chinese herbal traditions.

- Ginger has been used to treat many ailments including the common cold, headaches and arthritis, but the most popular use is for gastrointestinal relief.

- Due to the drying process which breaks down one of the volatile oils in ginger, dried ginger is more pungent than fresh.
Did You Know?

- During the American revolutionary war, soldiers received ginger in their food rations.
- Ginger is available fresh, dried, powdered, pickled, candied, and preserved.
- The sharp bite of fresh ginger comes from the aromatic compound called gingerol. This compound transforms when heated or dried to the sweeter zingerone.

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